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# P R E S B Y T E R I A N

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fication, may be regarded in the light of a concession and approach to the Catholic system, without giving up, however, the essentially evangelical basis.

On the other hand, in the sacramental controversy, he evidently made an approach, since 1534, and more decidedly in 1540 (when he changed the tenth article of the Augsburg Confession), to the Reformed type of doctrine, by relaxing the Lutheran theory of the real corporeal presence of Christ in, with, and under the elements of the Eucharist, and leaning to Calvin's view of a spiritual, real presence and fruition of Christ's body and blood, by faith. For reasons of prudence and from love of peace, he declined, in his old age, to take an active part in the renewed sacramental war between Westphal and Calvin, and to give a final, unmistakable expression of his views on this mysterious subject. He hoped that both theories might be tolerated in the evangelical churches. One of his last acts and testimonies, in the very year of his death, was a protest against the exclusiveness of the bigoted Heshus, and a virtual endorsement of the position of the Reformed party at Heidelberg, which immediately afterward triumphed in the Palatinate, under the lead of his favorite pupil, Zacharias Ursinus, the Calvinist Caspar Olevianus, and the pious Elector Frederic III. His shy, mild, amiable, and peaceful spirit breathes in the Heidelberg Catechism, which was prepared by these divines by order of the Elector and became the doctrinal standard of the German and Dutch Reformed Churches in Europe and America.

Melanchthon thus is a connecting link between the Lutheran and Reformed Confessions, equally honored by both, and represents the spirit and aim of Christian union on the basis of the everlasting Gospel as revealed in the New Testament and in the life and example of our Lord.

PHILIP SCHAFF.

## IV.

### THE RELIGIOUS BELIEF OF SHAKESPEARE.

IT is a remarkable tribute to the genius of Shakespeare, that after the lapse of three centuries, scholars in all nations are so deeply interested in whatever will throw light upon his personal history, or elucidate a single reading in any of his plays. While it is true of the study of all literature, that it is more than ever pursued, more wisely and thoroughly pursued, while literature itself is more fully recognized as one of the prime factors in civilization, the study of Shakespeare concentrates most attention on itself. Much of this is the dry and minute research of literary antiquarians. As such it has value. Much of it is a sort of Shakespearean exegesis, which forgets that the "letter killeth." It is a timely word of scholarly protest against an "anatomizing of Shakespeare," which has been recently uttered by Mr. Richard Grant White. But when the impetuous zeal for Shakespearean study proposes the reopening and ransacking of his grave at Stratford-on-Avon, all England rises in indignant protest, and all lovers of Shakespeare the world over say, Amen.

Meanwhile, in England, America and Germany especially, the study has been fruitful of good results. Such scholars here as Mr. Richard Grant White, Mr. Hudson, and Mr. Furness, have enriched the world of letters with true helps to the understanding and appreciation of the poet. Such treatises as those of Dr. Bucknill on the "Psychology of Shakespeare" or the "Medical Knowledge of Shakespeare," Mr. Dyer's work on the "Folk-lore of Shakespeare," pursuing special lines of investigation, have rendered valuable service. Such a work as Professor Dowden's "Critical Study of Shakespeare's Mind and Art" is in the deepest vein of critical and scholarly insight, and all the more suggestive that it is pursued in the philosophic spirit, which gives so much worth to Coleridge's fragmentary but deep-seeing comments. German commentaries on Shakespeare have been multiplied enormously. Much of their work is hazy speculation; but amid the mass, here and there a work like that of Professor Werder on Hamlet, or the earlier labors of Ulrici and Gervinus, are of undoubted value.

While the subject of Shakespeare's religious belief has not escaped notice amid the other questions, it has not been pursued with any method, at least of late. Various considerations prompt an inquiry on the subject. If there were no other reason, the fact that Shakespearean study is becoming so wide-spread in our higher schools as well as colleges, would make it a timely question. There can be no doubt that the excellent editions for such study will make his plays standard text-books in English. If, as has been claimed, Shakespeare is Roman Catholic, or agnostic, or atheistic in his religious belief, it concerns us to know it.

Aside from this, however, the question enters a region of valuable inquiry concerning the true basis and vital forces of literature. Has or has not literature anything to do with the moral nature? Is it something, as art, wholly apart from, outside of the moral nature, or does it in all its highest forms draw its deepest conceptions from this sphere of our being? Is *l'art pour l'art*, the sole article in a true literary creed, and is *Tendenz-poesie* a spurious development of the literary spirit? On these questions a study of Shakespeare's religious belief cannot fail to throw some light. He is the highest expression of the literary spirit which the ages of civilization have produced. Not only the highest, but the deepest and broadest. In him ought to be best studied the vital principles of literature and art. It is, in fact, one compensation for the paucity of all knowledge concerning his life—that we are thereby compelled to fix our attention on his works. Their study is embarrassed by no distracting personal questions.

Most of all, are scholars moved to this inquiry because of the diversity of opinions set forth in regard to this matter. It has been well said that Shakespeare is the "mystery as well as the glory of our literature." On many questions all attempt "to pluck out the heart of the mystery" seems futile. It may be said, however, as to the subject in hand, that the means for reaching a satisfactory conclusion are comparatively ample, since they are to be sought in his works rather than in his biography. If they were not, any one whose duties compel him to traverse the region of Shakespearean criticism would hesitate before adding another atom to the mass of conjectures which now burden the pages of so-called biographies of Shakespeare.

What, then, are the differing views on this question of Shakespeare's religious belief?

1. It has been claimed that Shakespeare was a Roman Catholic, and that his views and sympathies were those of that party in the Anglican Church, which supported the claims of the Papacy. The fact is both curious and suggestive, that this claim has been largely sup-

ported by a "copy of Shakespeare's will," on exhibition among the relics at Stratford-on-Avon, and which by comparison with the genuine will in Doctors' Commons has been proved a forgery. It has been urged also, as showing the early religious training of Shakespeare, that a John Shakespeare's will, discovered about the year 1770, and which is mainly a declaration of Roman Catholic tenets, was the last will and testament of Shakespeare's father. But research has shown that the document in question—if genuine—was the will of another John Shakespeare, in no way related to the dramatist. So, also, an argument favoring this view has been constructed from certain Romish beliefs embodied in Hamlet and other plays.

2. Against this view it has been asserted that Shakespeare "was a member of the Reformed Church of England; in other words, that he was a true Catholic Christian; and, as such, a Protestant against the errors and corruptions of the Church of Rome." The most conspicuous and learned advocate of this view is perhaps Charles Wordsworth, D.C.L., Bishop of St. Andrews, author of a volume entitled "Shakespeare's Knowledge and Use of the Bible." The aim of the book, primarily, is to show that Shakespeare was, "in a more than ordinary degree, a diligent and a devout reader of the Word of God; and that he has turned this reading to far more and better account than any of his critics would seem to have suspected, or at all events has yet attempted to point out," and that his genius was "content to study, and not unfrequently to draw his inspiration from, the pages of Holy Scripture, submitting his reason to the mysterious doctrines which it reveals, and his conscience to the moral lessons which it prescribes."\* In the course of the work Bishop Wordsworth announces and gives his reasons, for the view quoted, as to Shakespeare's relations with the Christian Church.

3. Mr. W. J. Birch, M.A., in 1848 published a work upon the Religion and Philosophy of Shakespeare, in which he maintains that Shakespeare, like Marlowe, was a free-thinker of the most virulent type. Of the *Two Gentlemen of Verona* he says, "the writer proceeds as though oblivious of any divine dispensation"; of the *Merchant of Venice*, "the skepticism of the play is of a bolder cast than Shakespeare has before ventured upon"; of *2 Henry IV.*, "Not merely the details, but the essentials of Christianity are the themes of his flippancy." These are but specimens of his manner in characterizing the different plays. The whole treatise is well described by Gervinus as "a book in which it is endeavored to be proved that Shakespeare

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\* "On Shakespeare's Knowledge and Use of the Bible." Gen. Introd., pp. 2, 3.

surpassed Marlowe and Greene in free-thinking, atheism, and profanity, and had learned Lucretian frivolity and a derision of religion from Boccaccio and the like." It is a specimen of perverse criticism which will put the work among the "curiosities of literature," if not among the monstrosities. No such insult has been offered Shakespeare since Greene, in his "*Groatsworth of Wit*," etc., spoke of him as an "upstart crow beautified with our feathers that with his '*Tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide*,' supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you." In fact, the whole book is so utterly wrong-headed and wrong-hearted that the reader is tempted to query whether it is not a wanton jest rather than a genuine conviction of the writer.

4. Mr. J. R. Greene, in his "Short History of the English People," would seemingly make Shakespeare more of an agnostic than anything else in matters of religion. He terms Montaigne the favorite author of our poet, and then proceeds to say: "It is impossible to discover whether his faith, *if faith there were* [the italics are ours], was Catholic or Protestant. *It is difficult indeed to say whether he had any religious faith or no.* The religious phrases which are thinly scattered over his works are little more than expressions of a distant and imaginative reverence. And on the deeper grounds of religious faith, *his silence is significant.* He is silent, and the doubt of Hamlet deepens his silence about the after-world. 'To die,' it may be, was to him as to Claudio, to go we know not where. Often, at any rate, as his questionings turn to the riddle of life and death, he leaves it a riddle to the last, without heeding the common theological solutions around him."\* We quote the passage at length, not only for the view of Shakespeare's religious belief or negation of belief which it points out, but also as a specimen of the way in which such views are made up. It makes of Shakespeare either a moral coward, who dared not say what he thought, or an inveterate doubter, whose opinions were so unsettled, that no resource but a significant silence was left him.

5. The view of Gervinus touching Shakespeare's religious belief, is the following. Having discussed the "moral spirit of Shakespeare's works" in a passage of considerable length and much discrimination, he declares that so far as poetry can lead men to a high and pure morality, so far Shakespeare has fulfilled the noblest mission of the poet. "To knit poetry to life by this moral cement, to sacrifice

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\* "Short History of the English People," p. 428.

the outer beauty to the higher morality, when the mirror was to be held up to life, to exhibit to the age in this mirror no æsthetic flattering picture, but a moral picture of unvarnished truth—this is throughout the express aim of Shakespeare's poetry." . . . "The relation of Shakespeare's poetry to morality and moral influence upon men is most perfect; in this respect, from Aristotle to Schiller, nothing higher has been asked of poetry than that which Shakespeare rendered."<sup>\*</sup>

But on the matter of religious faith, Gervinus thinks that Shakespeare was designedly silent, partly because he, like Bacon, did not choose to run counter to any opinions; still more because he did not mean to make a pulpit out of the stage. Most of all, because Shakespeare, conversant with the horrible persecutions of the times for religious opinions, and startled by them, liked best, when he needed moral advice, to dive into the revelation which God has written in the human heart.<sup>†</sup> In his view, therefore, on all questions of religious belief, Shakespeare in his dramas is colorless. While he never undervalued religious belief, he proclaimed himself the adherent of no system or creed. "He was no fanatic and no infidel, no atheist and no mystic, no Brownist and no politician; he was as much attracted by a good Roman Catholic, as by an honest Lutheran; he delineated heathens, free-thinkers, ritualists, and pietists, Brutus, Faulconbridge, Percy, and Katherine, all with equal delight, if only they were worthy characters." Gervinus agrees with Mr. J. R. Greene as to the fact of Shakespeare's silence on religious questions. But he refers it to a wholly different cause; one which impinges more upon the moral courage, but less upon the faith of the poet.

6. The late Professor J. S. Brewer, who held the chair of English Literature and Modern History in King's College, London, evidently agrees with Gervinus as to Shakespeare's silence on the fundamental question of Christian Faith, and wonders "why the poet should never have exhibited the influence of religious faith and resignation, or so cursorily or so coldly as scarcely to deserve the name." He ends his review of the case with an interrogatory which, however, contains a new suggestion: "Must we then think," he says, "that Shakespeare, like Bacon, was like Bacon unconsciously exhibiting the Calvinistic tendency, the downward and disorganizing progress of his age, by substituting man for God as the great centre of this universe, as the sole and engrossing subject of human interest?"<sup>‡</sup> This view

\* Gervinus, "Commentaries on Shakespeare," see p. 890.

† See Gervinus, Comm., pp. 909-10.

‡ "English Studies," pp. 271-272.

of Shakespeare is novel. It makes him, to a degree, responsible for the "downward and disorganizing progress of his age," and this by reason of an "unconscious Calvinistic tendency" in "substituting man for God, as the great centre of this universe." But the student of Shakespeare has long ceased to wonder at theories about his dramas, and only asks, "what next?" It will be seen by a comparison of these views that they fall into three classes: such as affirm him to have been a skeptic, more or less pronounced; such as affirm him to have been a Christian believer, and to have announced himself as such; such as affirm him to have purposely concealed his views on the religious questions of the day. Can we solve the problem as to which class he really belongs? What are the data for solving the problem? It is important to have the whole case before the reader; to have a candid survey of the whole ground on which a conclusion is to be founded. And it becomes a vital element in the prosecution of the inquiry, to ascertain, if possible, the leading characteristics of the age, as affecting such question.

First of all must be noted the influence of the English Bible on the mind as well as the heart of England. Mr. J. R. Greene, in the opening of his chapter on Puritan England,\* has given a vivid and truthful picture of this influence: "England," he says, "became the people of a book, and that book was the Bible." Of course the most direct and palpable effect of this access to the Bible in the Genevan or the Bishops' version, was seen upon the popular character. It was like the discovery of a new continent. It did open a new world of spiritual ideas, and images, of the most sacred and quickening devotions, of the most transforming motives. But it had its effect on literature. Every author or nearly every author of the time shows it. Nothing is more responsive than literature to great popular movements. It catches, by subtle and delicate sympathy, the higher impulses which sweep over the national heart and the convictions which hold the national mind. And therefore, at a time when the English nation was under the mighty spell of first acquaintance with the Bible in the fine old versions named, it could not be otherwise than that so universal a genius as Shakespeare should in some sort reflect the new spiritual world about him.

In addition to this, it should be considered, that the age of Shakespeare was not an age of religious doubt. It was an age of controversy. Thomas Cartwright wrote, "I deny that upon repentance there ought to follow any pardon of death. . . . Heretics ought to be put to death now. If this be bloody and extreme, I am content

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\* "Short History," ch. viii.

to be so counted, with the Holy Ghost."\* On the other hand, Queen Elizabeth's "Court of High Commission" is called by Gardiner, in his "Puritan Revolution," a kind of "Ecclesiastical star-chamber." The story of religious persecutions in England is accessible and familiar. Shakespeare was no stranger to it. In his earlier years, he must have been familiar with acts, which make our blood boil as we read of them in the pages of Neal. But it was not an age of doubt. The *Zeit-geist* was not a spirit of skepticism. The controversy raged on the points of belief mainly as to church polity. No question as to the existence of God, or the doctrine of immortality, or the genuineness of Revelation, disturbed men's minds. There was no English Montaigne, and slight, if any, evidence to show that Montaigne had any school of followers in England.

During the active literary life of Shakespeare, however, there was perceptible a moderated tone in all this controversy. Gardiner says,† "During the last years of Elizabeth's reign the waves of external conflict lulled themselves to sleep." This result was due to the overthrow of the Spanish Armada. So long as England was threatened by the Papacy in any of its Continental Powers—so long the fury against Romanism, abroad or at home, roused Englishmen to every degree of intensity. But when the power of the Papacy against England was shattered by the guns of Drake and the tempests of heaven, "to combat Spain and the Pope ceased to be the first thought of Englishmen." Gardiner says again: "If the bishops continued to oppose Calvin's system of church government, they gave their warm adherence to his theology. Large numbers of Puritans abandoned their Presbyterian theories and were ready to submit to the Episcopal constitution—if only they could be allowed to omit certain ceremonies."

This tolerance at once asserted itself in the literature of the day. It is distinctly traceable in Hooker. So much so, that Keble, in his introductory chapter to an edition of the great ecclesiastic's work on "Ecclesiastical Polity," is compelled to account for his moderate tone by saying that it is due in part to the fact that "the fulness of apostolical authority on this point," contained in the "genuine remains of St. Ignatius," had "never come within his cognizance." The tolerant spirit asserted itself in part also in Bacon. It would be easy to quote passages from the great philosopher, showing his moderation. But every student of Lord Bacon knows full well how all his writing is characterized by this tone of judicial moderation. It was in the in-

\* Quoted by Greene, "Short History," p. 456.

† "Puritan Revolution," p. 4.

tellectual as well as the spiritual atmosphere, in the literary as well as the theological—and in this atmosphere the plays of Shakespeare were written.

Keeping, then, in mind these characteristics of the age of Shakespeare, the evidence as to Shakespeare's religious belief may be presented. It is of two sorts—external and internal. The first is derived from facts in his life. The second from his works, as passages in these may be supposed to embody his religious views. The first, or external, evidence, though scanty like that on other questions of his biography, is yet decisive in its character. The note is not often struck; but when it is struck, gives no uncertain sound. The second, or internal, is more full and not less decisive, and only needs wise discrimination in its selection.

Beginning, then, with the external evidence, the language used in the opening clause of Shakespeare's will is directly in point. The will itself is not in Shakespeare's handwriting. It was drawn by a scrivener on three sheets of paper, each of which has Shakespeare's signature. Its date, originally January, was changed to March 25, 1616, or, as Professor Dowden states it, on the latter date "he [Shakespeare] executed the will which in January had been drawn." In less than a month from that time (April 23, 1616) Shakespeare had died. The will was drawn and executed in that last period of his life, almost at its very close, when Shakespeare had withdrawn from active connection with the stage, and was living in his beloved Stratford. It was the period in which his last plays were written—such as *Cymbeline*, *The Tempest*, and the *Winter's Tale*. They form a group remarkable not more for their charm as dramatic writings than for a distinct and impressive moral characteristic. "The spirit of these last plays," says Professor Dowden,\* "is that of serenity which results from fortitude, and the recognition of human frailty; all of them express a deep sense of the need of repentance, and the duty of forgiveness."

The will itself begins thus: "I, William Shakespeare, of Stratford-upon-Avon, in the Countie of Warr, gent, in perfect health and memorie, God be praysed, doe make and ordayne this my last will and testament in manner and form followeing, that ys to say. First I commend my soule into the handes of God, my Creator, hoping and assuredly beleeving through thonelie merittes of Jesus Christ my Saviour, to be made partaker of lyfe everlasting, and my body to the earth whereof yt ys made."

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\* "Primer of Shakespeare," p. 60.

If this language expresses the actual belief of Shakespeare, it of course certifies him a believer in Christianity and in the specific doctrines of Salvation only through the merits of Christ, and of Christian immortality. Does it express such a belief? Or was it merely the decorous form which the scrivener employed according to his habit? Shakespeare's signature is on the page which contains the opening clause, as on the others. This fact certainly warrants the conclusion that he meant to adopt the sentiments as his own, just as he adopted the bequests which follow. Still it is wise to ask what such critics as Birch mean when they discredit the will as any witness to his faith, by declaring it a mere legal form. The apostles' creed is a "form of sound words." But no honest man ever repeats it, who denies or doubts the doctrinal truths it embodies. It is true such forms were common in Shakespeare's day. They vary somewhat. That of John Heming is longer and more specific. That of John Underwood is shorter and more general.\* These forms meant general belief in the doctrines of Christianity. Men took that opportunity to declare their belief, specially in the great doctrine of redemption through Christ. If Shakespeare complied with a decent form, it was only because he felt that it was becoming in him to avow his faith in his Redeemer. To allow so specific and emphatic a statement of such a faith to stand where it does—if his heart did not go with it, was to trifle, if not worse, with most solemn verities. Believe this who can of William Shakespeare! Rather do his own words in the mouth of the dying Gaunt show how he regarded human language uttered in view of death.

"O, but they say the tongues of dying men  
Enforce attention like deep harmony :  
When words are scarce, they are seldom spent in vain,  
For they breathe truth, that breathe their words in pain.  
He that no more must say is listen'd more  
Than they whom youth and ease have taught to glose :  
More are men's ends mark'd than their lives before."

*King Richard II., Act ii., Sc. i.*

The other point of external evidence is one which Bishop Wordsworth insists on as the "most conclusive proof" of Shakespeare's conformity as a member of the Church of England.† The poet stood "as a sponsor to William Walker, whom he mentions in his will as his godson, and who was baptized at Stratford, October 16, 1608." If this stood alone, not much perhaps could be made of it as any index to Shakespeare's real opinion on the subject of religion.

\* Jonson and Steeven's Shakespeare, vol. iii., pp. 230, 261.

† "Shakespeare's Knowledge and Use of the Bible," pp. 271, *et seq.*

But taken in connection with the confession of faith in his will, and taken in connection with his allusions to the rites of the Church in his works, and also with the statements of Christian doctrine which his works contain, it is difficult to break the force of the conclusion that he held common ground with English churchmen. Certainly he was no open dissident from the received views. This would convict him of insincerity, and hypocrisy is an ingredient which in compounding his villains, Shakespeare never omits.

If, however, the external evidence as to Shakespeare's religious belief is scant, the case is very different when we come to the internal proof—that to be drawn from his works. The examination of these will show that the confession of faith in his will, is only the later expression—after he had ceased to write—of a faith which his earliest as well as his latest dramas embody, and which was the faith in which he had been trained by his parents. It is very noticeable that those who throw doubt on his acceptance of the Christian system, make much of his supposed silence. This is specially the case with two of the more recent critics, Mr. J. R. Greene and Professor J. S. Brewer.\* If it were true, that in his dramas Shakespeare had introduced sparingly and remotely allusions to the Christian Faith, that fact could not militate against such evidence as the confession of his belief in his last will and testament. It is certainly not the mission of the drama to preach Christianity. This fact is a curious and interesting one, that in its earlier form on the Continent and in England, it was used as a propagandist of the doctrines of the Reformation.† Queen Mary ascended the English throne, July, 1553. In the month following, a royal proclamation appeared, "the object of which was, among other things, to prevent the performance of plays and interludes calculated to advance the principles and doctrines of the Reformation."‡ But while Shakespeare never made a pulpit out of the stage, while his allusions are incidental, it cannot with any fairness be said that his silence goes a whit beyond the demands of dramatic propriety. He did not preach, but he did not suppress convictions. But so far is it from being true, that Shakespeare has been silent, and that the silence should be construed as significant of downright unbelief or helpless doubt, an investigation will show the contrary. It was said by the master of

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\* It is only just to Professor Brewer to say, that in his essay on the Study of Shakespeare, he lays stress on the idea that Shakespeare is the "most divine, the most deeply religious and the truest of our poets," because he enabled men to see that "there was a divine foundation in the common laws and relations, that through them God was making manifest His divine order."—"English Studies," pp. 290-291.)

† See Dr. Carl Hase's "Historical Survey of Miracle Plays and Sacred Dramas."

‡ Collier, "Annals of the Stage," vol. i., p. 156.

Pembroke Hall, of his friend Thomas Gray, the poet, "he never spoke out." This cannot be said of Shakespeare in reference to Christianity. *He has spoken out.* The work of Bishop Wordsworth, on Shakespeare's knowledge and use of the Bible, in which the great dramatist's numerous references to the Word of God are collated and classified, is an invaluable testimony on this point. He has summed up the result in the following sentence : "Take the entire range of English literature; put together our best authors, who have written upon subjects not professedly religious or theological, and we shall not find, I believe, in them *all united*, so much evidence of the Bible having been read and used, as we have found in Shakespeare alone."\* It is impossible to account for this on any theory which makes Shakespeare an unbeliever. It accords entirely with the view that he was not only a student of, but a believer in, Divine Revelation.

The extent to which he carried the practice of Scriptural allusion will be best shown if we tabulate some portions of the references to the facts and characters of the Bible which have been cited by Bishop Wordsworth.

- Mosaic Account of the Creation. † *Tempest*, Act i., Sc. 2, l. 335.—*King Richard II.*, Act iii., Sc. 4, l. 73-6.—*Comedy of Errors*, Act iv., Sc. 3, l. 13-15.
- Mosaic Account of the Temptation and Fall. *Love's Labor's Lost*, Act v., Sc. 2, l. 322.—  
1 *King Henry IV.*, Act iii., Sc. 3, l. 185.—*Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Act iii., Sc. 1, l. 342.—*As You Like It*, Act ii., Sc. 1, l. 5.
- History of Cain and Abel. *King Richard II.*, Act i., Sc. 1, l. 103-5.—*Hamlet*, Act iii., Sc. 3, l. 37.—2 *King Henry IV.*, Act i., Sc. 1, l. 157.—*King Richard II.*, Act v., Sc. 5, l. 43.—*Hamlet*, Act v., Sc. 1, l. 85.
- The Flood. *Comedy of Errors*, Act iii., Sc. 2, l. 108.—*As You Like It*, Act v., Sc. 4, l. 35.
- The Book of Job. *Merry Wives of Windsor*, Act v., Sc. 5, l. 162-3.—2 *King Henry IV.*, Act i., Sc. 2, l. 144-5.
- History of Jacob. *Merchant of Venice*, Act i., Sc. 3, l. 72-90; Act ii., Sc. 5, l. 36.—2 *King Henry VI.*, Act ii., Sc. 3, l. 19.
- History of Pharaoh. *Hamlet*, Act iii., Sc. 4, l. 64-5.—1 *King Henry IV.*, Act ii., Sc. 4, l. 520.—*Twelfth Night*, Act iv., Sc. 2, l. 48.—*As You Like It*, Act ii., Sc. 5, l. 63.
- Manna. *Merchant of Venice*, Act v., Sc. 1, l. 295.
- Law of Inheritance. *King Henry V.*, Act i., Sc. 2, l. 98-100.
- Jephtha. 3 *King Henry VI.*, Act v., Sc. 1, l. 91.—*Hamlet*, Act ii., Sc. 2, l. 22.
- Samson. *Love's Labor's Lost*, Act i., Sc. 2, l. 75, 179.
- David. *Merry Wives of Windsor*, Act v., Sc. 1, l. 22.
- Nebuchadnezzar. *All's Well, etc.*, Act iv., Sc. 5, l. 21.
- Herod. *King Henry V.*, Act iii., Sc. 3, l. 40-1.—*Antony and Cleopatra* Act i., Sc. 2, l. 29.—*Merry Wives of Windsor*, Act ii., Sc. 1, l. 20.
- Golgotha. *King Richard II.*, Act iv., Sc. 1, l. 144.—*Macbeth*, Act i., Sc. 2, l. 40.
- Judas. *King Richard II.*, Act iv., Sc. 1, l. 170.—3 *King Henry VI.*, Act v., Sc. 7, l. 34-5.—*Timon of Athens*, Act iii., Sc. 2, l. 73.—*Winter's Tale*, Act i., Sc. 2, l. 419

\* "Shakespeare's Knowledge and Use of the Bible," p. 339.]

† These references are to the Globe Ed. of Shakespeare.

Pilate. *King Richard II.*, Act iv., Sc. 1, l. 239-40.—*King Richard III.*, Act i., Sc. 4, l. 279.

Barabbas. *Merchant of Venice*, Act iv., Sc. 1, l. 296.

These citations are far from being all the allusions to Holy Scripture which the industry of Bishop Wordsworth has gathered. They are tabulated from his first chapter. They are enough to show several things in regard to Shakespeare's use of the Bible. He was driven to it by no dramatic necessity. These allusions seem to have come out of a mind saturated with the teachings of the Bible. They are thrown off in the most easy and natural way—in the manner they would be employed by one to whom the whole subject was most familiar. Certainly, also, they are too frequent to allow of such a phrase as Mr. J. R. Greene employs in regard to them, "religious phrases *thinly scattered*\* over his works." They certainly cover a wide range of historical allusion in Old Testament and New. And what Bishop Wordsworth insists on must be kept in mind, that by comparison, not only with the writers of the Elizabethan period, with Bacon, or Raleigh, or Spenser, but with the literature of any period in English history, this habit of Scriptural allusion in Shakespeare's plays becomes most striking and impressive.

Complaint, indeed, has been made that Shakespeare is often irreverent in his use of Scripture: that he uses it to point his jests; that he puts it sometimes in the mouths of the profane. Mr. Birch cites, as an instance of this, the words of Eleanor, Duchess of Gloucester, to Queen Margaret (*2 King Henry VI.*, Act i., Sc. 3):

" Could I come near your beauty with my nails,  
I'd set *my ten Commandments* in your face."

When in *Hamlet*, Act v., Sc. 1, the 1st clown says:

" What, art a heathen? How dost thou understand Scripture? The Scripture says, *Adam digged*. Could he dig without arms?"

it is cited as a jesting use of Scripture, which it is also urged a proper habit of reverence would never allow. And this irreverence is said to be beyond all bounds when in *2 King Henry VI.*, Act v., Sc. 1, Richard says to Lord Clifford:

" Fye! charity, for shame! Speak not in spite  
For you shall sup with Jesus Christ to-night."

To which it may be said, first, that these and similar allusions are exceptional; that they do not of necessity bear an irreverent construction in all cases. If they are taken as evidence of Shakespeare's

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\* The italics are ours.

flippant use of Scripture, and so of unbelief in the Bible, such reasoning would convict many a believer since his day who has not hesitated to point his jests with a text of Scripture. The practice may be very reprehensible. Doubtless it is so. But the instances in which Shakespeare has transcended the reverent use of Scripture are few.

Again, it must be considered that the majority of his allusions are reverent, distinctly so. They add majesty to his language. The allusions specially to the gospel history, and to the Person of our Lord, are of singular reverence and beauty. No earnest believer in the Divinity of the Scriptures could have put more reverence into the use of them than as they are referred to by Shakespeare. And it is when speaking of Holy Scripture as a whole, that this habit of reverence comes out most fully. He refers to it as *God's Book, the Books of God, The Word*. In all this Shakespeare was but the child of his age. It is part of his greatness that he was so quick to see what immense capacity of literary suggestion was in that English Bible that the men of his day were so eagerly reading. He, too, was under its solemn and mighty spell. Far from being in any revolt against its teachings, he not only accepted them, but he had caught their choicest spirit. Some of his finest passages are exquisitely flavored with this inspired diction. His genius bowed itself to the authority of Revelation. But his genius bowed itself, only to receive a benediction at the hand of the Revelation it had accepted.

Aside from this familiar acquaintance with, and reverent use of, the Bible in his dramas, there is another line of evidence as to his religious belief. It comes from the religious sentiments avowed in his plays. These cover a wide field. They range from the simplest elements of theistic belief to the most distinctive doctrines of revealed religion. Here, too—as in regard to his use of the Bible—a principle of selection must be adopted. All that can be attempted is to show how Shakespeare regarded the more prominent teachings of the Christian Faith. It is obvious that not everything which his characters may utter, can with propriety be taken as the opinion of the dramatist himself. An article upon Euripides as a Religious Teacher, in the *Contemporary Review* for April, 1884, by Canon Westcott, is a good illustration of legitimate argument in such cases.\*

It is freely admitted that not everything which the characters of Shakespeare utter, is to be taken as the opinion of the dramatist

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\* Especially that part of the article, pp. 552-558, in which it is shown that "in spite of the obvious sorrows of life, he (Euripides) can discern that a divine purpose is being wrought out which will find accomplishment."

himself. But there are utterances which betray plainly the dramatist's sympathy with the sentiments uttered by the characters of his plays. What is needful is wise and candid discrimination. The canon of criticism laid down by Gervinus is just and practicable: \* "It may be asked, how, amid the numberless, endlessly contradictory, characteristic expressions of his figures, can his own opinions be with certainty discovered? We might reply, that the opinions which are most frequently on the lips of his purer characters, and are repeated at every opportunity, point out the basis of the poet's mode of thought, and because they are so predominant in his mind, they must be most his own."

Let us apply this canon to some utterances of Christian sentiments found in the plays, and we shall see how they may be fairly construed as reflecting the opinions of Shakespeare himself.

I. Affection and reverence for Christ, the Saviour. All are familiar with the allusion to the Redeemer in the following lines:

" Those holy fields  
Over whose acres walked those blessed feet,  
Which, fourteen hundred years ago, were nailed  
For our advantage, on the bitter cross."

*1 King Henry IV., Act i., Sc. 1, l. 24-6.*

Another and similar allusion to Christ is found in

"The world's ransom, blessed Mary's Son."

*King Richard II., Act iv., Sc. 1.*

And again, in the words of Polixines, when he is defending himself from the guilt of the sin charged on him by Leontes,

"O ! then my best blood turn  
To an infected jelly ; and my name  
Be yoked with his that did betray the Best."

*Winter's Tale, Act i., Sc. 2, l. 417-19.*

That passages like these reveal Shakespeare's own feeling toward the Redeemer of the world, is evident from the fact that there was nothing but such a feeling to account for them. They are not drawn out of him by any dramatic necessity. To suppose them put by him into the mouths of these personages, while reflecting no sympathetic mood of his own, is a forced explanation of their use, which does not leave Shakespeare's character untouched. It would make him, to say the least, a trifler with the dearest and sacredest of names. Would he have ventured on this? The same thing is further shown when we come to consider

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\* "Commentaries on Shakespeare," Gervinus, p. 894.

2. Shakespeare's allusions to the Atonement of Christ. Clarence, in *King Richard III.*, makes this appeal to the murderers :

"I charge you, as you hope to have redemption  
By Christ's dear blood, shed for our grievous sins,  
That you depart, and lay no hand on me."

*King Richard III.*, Act i., Sc. 4, l. 194-6.

A similar adjuration embodies the same great doctrine, 2 *King Henry VI.*, Act i., Sc. 1 :

"Now, by the death of Him that died for all."

It is, however, in such language as we find in the mouths of Portia and Isabella, that the fullest expression of belief in an atonement for sin, is found. These were characters in which Shakespeare evidently had great satisfaction. Every touch is drawn with a loving hand. What they say, Shakespeare evidently felt. So, in her plea with Shylock for mercy to Antonio, which is founded on the character of mercy as a divine attribute, and every line of which is charged with deep emotion, Portia sums up the appeal, thus :

"Therefore, Jew,  
Tho' justice be thy plea, consider this.  
That, in the course of justice none of us  
Should see salvation."

*Merchant of Venice*, Act iv., Sc. 4.

The force of the plea turns on the fact that the Divine Mercy *seasons* the Divine Justice, and that the salvation of men comes through this harmonizing of the Divine Attributes in the redemption of Christ. Sir W. Blackstone has, indeed, objected to this speech as inopportune, since to refer a Jew to the Christian doctrine of salvation, and the Lord's Prayer, is a little out of character. On what other ground could Portia plant herself than that the "middle-wall of partition" had been broken down between Jew and Gentile, and that Jew and Greek were alike to be saved through the one Redeemer. It is true, there is no direct reference to Christ. But, while such a reference would have seemed out of keeping, the plea of the Civil Doctor—founded on this great scheme of redemption—is indicative of Shakespeare's view of the doctrine.

Again, when Isabella, pleading for her brother's life with Angelo, utters the following words, it is irresistibly felt that Shakespeare's soul was in them :

"Alas ! Alas !  
Why all the souls that were, were forfeit once,  
And He that might the advantage but have took  
Found out the remedy."

*Measure for Measure*, Act ii., Sc. 2, l. 72-5.

Warwick, bringing his sovereign to view the body of the dead Gloucester, thus takes his solemn oath :

“As surely as my soul intends to live  
With that dread King that took our state upon him  
To free us from his father's wrathful curse.”

*2 King Henry VI., Act iii., Sc. 2, l. 72-5.*

Two things should be carefully noted here. First, in all these allusions to Christ and his work, the tone is one of affection and trust. It is warm, deep, and confiding. The expressions have a singular tenderness about them. They might be as well written by George Herbert or John Keble. In fact, the whole range of English Hymnology does not contain a sweeter or more sacred allusion to the Incarnation than the lines—

“Those holy fields,  
Over whose acres walked those blessed feet,  
Which, fourteen hundred years ago, were nailed  
For our advantage on the bitter cross.”

The second point to be noted is this, that the expressions in the plays touching the Redemption of Christ, are in so exact harmony with the expression in the Will—"hoping and assuredlie beleeving through thonelie merittes of Jesus Christ, my Saviour," etc. The same note is struck in both. It is that of absolute dependence on the atonement of Christ for salvation from sin—the doctrine of the Church which was unquestioned in that day.

There is no moral element in Shakespeare more conspicuous than his portrayal of conscience. This goes without saying. But it has not been so generally noted, that while depicting the action of remorse, he is equally powerful in depicting the province and availability of penitential prayer. Bishop Wordsworth has stated the case none too strongly when he says, “He takes care to let us know that our repentance, in order to be real, must proceed from sorrow felt, not because we are to be punished for our sin, but because by it we have offended One whom it concerns us most of all to please; that, in order to be acceptable, it must be accompanied by confession and amendment, amendment which will lead us to make reparation, to the utmost of our power, for what we have done amiss; and that, after all, its efficacy consists, not in any power of its own, but solely in the covenanted mercy and promises of God through Christ.”

The passage which most fully illustrates and corroborates these views, is the celebrated one in *Hamlet*, where the King attempts to pray :

" What if this cursed hand  
 Were thicker than itself with brother's blood ?  
 Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens  
 To wash it white as snow ? Whereto serves mercy,  
 But to confront the visage of offence ?  
 And what's in Prayer, but this twofold force,—  
 To be forestalled ere we come to fall,  
 Or pardoned, being down ? Then I'll look up.  
 My fault is past. But, O ! what form of prayer  
 Can serve my turn ? Forgive me my foul murder !  
 That cannot be ; since I am still possessed  
 Of those effects for which I did the murder,—  
 My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen."

It is with a sort of surprise that we come upon this scene in *Hamlet*. It is not essential to the development of the action in the play. The character of Claudius, before and after, when he is holding wild debauch (Act i., Sc. 4), and when he is plotting with Laertes against the life of Hamlet (Act iv., Sc. 7), is out of all keeping with such a mood as that of humble, penitential prayer, and this fact gives color of truth to Dr. Bucknill's view, that "in writing this speech [of Hamlet's], and the King's soliloquy, Shakespeare had in mind the intention of conveying instruction on the nature and office of prayer, rather than that of developing the plot."\*

It is no part of the design of this article to set forth all Shakespeare's teaching on religious subjects. We pass by much that is interesting and striking; as his views of the Divine Being and Attributes; of sin—its nature and its guilt; of the Christian virtues, faith, and charity, and gratitude. On the subject of prayer, he is very outspoken, both as to its efficacy and also as to its true nature, on the latter point piercing to the very core of true supplication. On Bosworth Field, Richmond bids his followers

" Remember this :  
 God, and our good cause, fight upon our side ;  
 The prayers of holy saints and wronged souls,  
 Like high-rear'd bulwarks, stand before our faces."

*King Richard III., Act v., Sc. 3.*

More touching and more impressive still is the language of Richmond ere he sleeps, on the eventful night before the battle :

" To Thee, I do commend my watchful soul  
 Ere I let fall the window of my eyes.  
 Sleeping and waking, O defend me still."

The entire prayer, of which these lines make the conclusion, is of singular loftiness, and it is easy to find in it the influence of the

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\* " Psychology of Shakespeare," pp. 79-81.

Psalter. It is an echo from the inspired prayers of the Old Testament. "It is said that all this is the common belief of the time. Exactly so. Into that belief Shakespeare entered, as is further seen by his view as to what makes effectual prayer. For prayer, as a mere form of words, on more than one occasion Shakespeare brings out his utter contempt. In that remarkable passage, which describes the King's vain attempt at prayer, the whole scene of the struggle ends as the King, rising, says,

"My words fly up, my thoughts remain below :  
Words without thoughts never to heaven go."

*Hamlet*, Act iii., Sc. 3, l. 97-8.

And the guilty Deputy, in *Measure for Measure*, has uttered in his soliloquy (Act ii., Sc. 4) a most forcible application of the Psalmist's cry, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."

"When I would pray and think, I think and pray  
To several subjects. Heaven hath my empty words,  
Whilst my invention, hearing not my tongue,  
Anchors on Isabel : Heaven in my mouth,  
As if I did but only chew his name ;  
And in my heart, the strong and swelling evil  
Of my conception."

On the subject of Providence, Shakespeare's deliverances are, if anything, more striking. Thrice at least he has put in the mouth of favorite characters a belief in a supernatural Providence—positive and specific, as when Hamlet says to Horatio,

"Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well  
When our deep plots do fall; and that should teach us  
There is a divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough hew them how we will."

*Hamlet*, Act v., Sc. 2, l. 8-12.

And later in the same play, as Horatio begs him to take counsel of his forebodings, he says,

"We defy augury; there's a  
Special providence in the fall of a sparrow."

*Hamlet*, Act v., Sc. 2, l. 221-2.

And when Adam, in *As You Like It*, is offering to the banished Orlando all his little store, he does it with these words of cheerful trust in Providence :

"Take that, and he that doth the ravens feed  
Yea—providently caters for the sparrow,  
Be comfort to my age."

*As You Like It*, Act ii., Sc. 3, l. 43-5.

We are specially interested in the endeavor to ascertain Shakespeare's views on the subject of immortality, because it is on this

point, it has been most urged, he is either silent or inclined to doubt. It makes strongly against any such view as Mr. J. R. Greene has presented, that on other points of Christian doctrine Shakespeare has spoken so clearly. Could he accept a doctrine of atonement and then be doubtful about a hereafter? Let us see, however, such passages as are cited to show his doubts on the immortality of the soul.

One is found in *Measure for Measure*, where the Duke in the disguise of a monk is striving to reconcile Claudio to the idea of death.

“Thy best of rest is sleep,  
And that thou oft provokest; yet grossly fear'st  
Thy death, which is no more.”

Act iii., Sc. 1.

But it would be utterly unfair to take a passage put in the mouth of a thoroughly detestable character, at that very juncture playing the part of a perfidious villain, as expressing any belief of Shakespeare himself. The whole speech of the disguised Duke is in a scoffing tone. Moreover, it should be remembered that in Shakespeare's time it was a common opinion that many a monk was at heart a skeptic. The speech throughout is in this character.

Claudio's words to Isabella in the same play are also cited as showing the denial or doubt of immortality.

“Ay, but to die and go we know not where,  
To lie in cold obstruction and to rot,  
This sensible warm motion to become  
A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit  
To bathe in fiery floods.”

*Measure for Measure*, Act iii., Sc. 1, l. 118-122.

But how strangely it has escaped the notice of these critics, that in this very passage—and in direct connection with the phrase supposed to prove Shakespeare's doubts, Claudio goes on to speak of what happens after death to the disembodied spirit—its bathing in fiery floods, or residing in thrilling regions of thick-ribbed ice. This may be purgatory, but it is not annihilation. So too we are pointed to Hamlet's celebrated soliloquy, “To be or not to be,” and his words are quoted as the word of a doubter.

“To die—to sleep  
No more. \* \* \* \* \* To die—to sleep,  
To sleep—perchance to dream; ay, there's the rub,  
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come  
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,  
Must give us pause.”

*Hamlet*, Act iii., Sc. 1, l. 60-8.

But what is the rub? Not, certainly, dread of annihilation—but what death may introduce the spirit to in place of

“The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks  
That flesh is heir to.”

Such critics forget that the whole structure of the play is built on the doctrine of a hereafter, and furthermore that Hamlet had always said in reply to the remonstrance of Horatio against any exposure of himself to the power of this ghostly visitant,

“And for my soul, what can it do to that  
Being a thing immortal in itself?”

*Hamlet, Act i., Sc. 4, l. 66-7.*

As to the meaning of the language used by Claudio and Hamlet, the simple and obvious interpretation is this, that there is in the soul a natural and powerful shrinking from entrance upon a state all unknown to us. What soul has not known this, however firm and clear the belief in Christian immortality?

Professor Brewer quotes Hamlet's dying words,

“The rest is silence.” \*

*Hamlet, Act v., Sc. 2, l. 368.*

as a proof of Hamlet's doubt. But this is strange, if not perverse, criticism. The silence is on what had been so mysteriously revealed to Hamlet, on that which had moved him to put his “antic disposition on,” and to play his sad and baffled part in life. Horatio has no doubts of his friend's immortality as he utters his exquisitely sweet and simple elegy :

“Good-night, sweet prince,  
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.”

*Hamlet, Act v., Sc. 2, l. 370.*

The allusion, in Shakespeare's plays, both to heaven and to hell, cannot be readily explained if we assume on Shakespeare's part anything of doubt or denial of immortality. These allusions show his sympathy with the accepted views on Eschatology. The play of *Hamlet* embodies the mediaeval notion of a purgatory. But the notion of the soul's existence after death is, of course, involved in a doctrine of purgatorial fire.

Nor can it fail to have struck every close student of his plays that the doctrine of a general judgment had made on his soul a firm and lasting impression. Of course, such a doctrine has in it great dramatic power. It could have been used by any such dramatist as

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\* Hudson gives these words to Horatio.

Marlowe to produce dramatic effects. But the use of it by Shakespeare as a dramatist is such for moral impressiveness and power, it is so handled by him, that we instinctively accept it as his own belief. When the murder of Duncan is announced it is Macduff who exclaims in that mighty passage (*Macbeth*, Act ii., Sc. 3),

“ Up, up, and see  
The great doom’s image.”

So in *Romeo and Juliet*, when Tybalt is slain, and Juliet imagines Romeo dead also, she exclaims (Act iii., Sc. 2),

“ Then dreadful trumpet sound the general doom.”

Hamlet, also, brooding over the crimes against his father, finds no words equal to the description of the guilty deed, but words like these :

“ Heaven’s face doth glow;  
Yea, this solidity and compound mass,  
With tristful visage as against the doom,  
Is thought-sick at the act.”

*Hamlet*, Act iii., Sc. 4.

Even more impassioned is the language of the young Lord Clifford after the battle of St. Albans, his father killed, his hopes all overthrown :

“ Oh, let the vile world end,  
And the premised flames of the last day  
Knit earth and heaven together !  
Now let the general trumpet blow his blast,  
Particularities and petty sounds  
To cease !”

*2 King Henry VI.*, Act v., Sc. 2.

Even in *Lear*, the play—the scene of which is laid in pagan England, and the remarkable absence of all allusion to Christianity in which is in exact keeping with the historic facts—has yet one allusion to the day of judgment. It occurs almost at the close of the play, in that scene of blended pathos and tragic horror, at Cordelia’s death, when Lear has entered with Cordelia dead in his arms. Kent’s great soul gives way in the outcry,

“ Is this the promised end ?”

And Edgar, catching the thought from his lips, completes the picture,

“ Or image of that hour ?”

*Lear*, Act v., Sc. 3.

But possibly of deeper import as a witness to Shakespeare’s own belief, is that passage in *Hamlet*, where the King, meditating on his

sins, and struggling to find relief from his remorseful thoughts in prayer, makes this contrast between earthly and the heavenly tribunals :

" In the corrupted currents of the world,  
Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice ;  
. . . . But 'tis not so above.  
There is no shuffling ; there the action lies  
In his true nature ; and we ourselves compelled,  
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,  
To give in evidence."

*Hamlet*, Act iii., Sc. 3.

Strachey, in his essay on Hamlet, speaking of the religion of Hamlet, has some remarks which bear closely on the subject we have discussed, and on its mode of presentation. "I have asserted," he says, "that it was Hamlet's religion, his resorting to prayer, that saved him from utter loss of reason after his first interview with the Ghost, and now that it is his clear and religious faith in God's presence and providence that dispels all the clouds from his path, and prepares a bright close to the stormy and shortened days of his life. *It is true, that the sentences and words on which these assertions rest, are short and few, but I know not what other critical explanation of them can be given, and it must be always borne in mind that the object of a drama would be destroyed, and its perfectness as a poem or work of art, all marred, if religion were brought prominently forward in it. For the aim of the drama is to exhibit the human, not the religious, side of man's existence ; and therefore, though the two are inseparable, . . . . the latter is to be assumed and suggested in a drama, rather than openly displayed and appealed to.*" \*

There remains, however, one more question to be settled in regard to the religious belief of Shakespeare. What position did he hold as to the Church ? With which of the three parties then dividing the Church—Romanists, Anglicans, and Puritans—was he in sympathy ? It seems clear that the general cast of his views on such questions was, like that of Hooker and Bacon, marked by a careful avoidance of extremes. It has been strikingly said, in regard to the political views which his historical dramas convey, that "the poet kept his fore-finger on the pulse of the times." But he was no blind adherent of a doctrine of divine right. On the other hand, he was no worshipper of popular power. In his political, as in his ecclesiastical views, the "golden mean" was his motto.

As to Puritanism, it is clear that Shakespeare kept himself aloof from it. He has several allusions to Puritans, generally in a tone of

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\* Strachey's Essay on Hamlet, p. 97. The italics are ours.

good-natured banter, yet such as to imply he had no sympathy with the party. When, in *Twelfth Night* (Act ii., Sc. 3), Sir Toby asks Maria to tell something of Malvolio, she replies,

“Marry, sir, sometimes he is a kind of Puritan.  
*Sir Andr.* O, if I thought that, I'd beat him like a dog.  
*Sir Toby.* What, for being a Puritan? Thy exquisite reason, dear knight.  
*Sir Andr.* I have no exquisite reason for't, but I have reason good enough.”

The clause in the *Winter's Tale*, describing what the Mistress of the Sheep-Shears' feast has provided for the guests, says, “She hath made me four-and-twenty nose-gays for the Shearers, three-man-song-men all, and very good ones; but they are most of them means and bases; but one Puritan amongst them, and he sings Psalms to horn-pipes” (Act iv., Sc. 3).

“Young Charbon, the *Puritan*, and old Poysam, the *Papist*, are named together (*All's Well that Ends Well*, Act i., Sc. 3) not ill-naturedly, but as if the writer had no more sympathy with the one than with the other.”

The satire is somewhat sharper in what the Clown says to the Countess (*All's Well that Ends Well*, Act i., Sc. 3), yet it is not in the savage vein by which contemporary dramatists satirized the Puritans: “Though honesty be no Puritan, yet it will do no hurt; it will wear the surplice of humility over the black gown of a big heart.” In fact, if Shakespeare's tone as to Puritanism be contrasted with that of Ben Jonson in his *Bartholomew Fair*, it will be seen at once, that while not a tone of sympathy, it is far enough from being that of fierce hostility, or bitter and unjust lampooning.

But, if Shakespeare was no Puritan, he was far enough from being in any sympathy with the Romanizing party in the English Church. This is seen readily enough in Shakespeare's representation of churchmen. And is not Mr. Singer quite right in saying, “One thing is certain, that the only reproach which he [Shakespeare] allows himself to make against the old religion, is connected with the political pretensions of the Papacy.”\* It was these “political pretensions” which made of many Englishmen in his day, first Protestants, and then Puritans. That Shakespeare's sympathies were Protestant, his *King John* would seem to make sufficiently clear. Doubtless, it is true, as Mr. Singer has said, that “all the libellous satire against monks and nuns, with which the old *King John* is filled, is cleared away by him.” But after this is said, there is this much more to be said, that in drawing

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\* *Transactions New Shakespeare Soc.*, 1874, p. 439.

the portrait of Pandulph, Shakespeare showed how far aloof he stood from the religious system which tolerated and made its Pandulphs.

There seems no ground to question the statement, that Shakespeare was in sympathy with the Reformed Church of England. Never a religious partisan, he was intensely loyal to England and England's Queen. This alone, it seems to us, would have determined his position ecclesiastically. The religious views he puts forth are in accordance with this position. That he was a worshipper in the church at Stratford-on-Avon, holding to the views of such men as Hooker and Bacon, and joining in the venerable and decorous forms of the Book of Common Prayer, there is every reason for believing, and none for discarding.

At the same time, it is clear that Shakespeare, "in his references to the superstitions of the lower clergy, had in his mind's eye the exorcisms, the prophecies, the impostures, of the fanatics of his day, exposed by Lord Henry Howard, Bishop Harsnet (whose book gave him some of the names of the devils in *Lear*), Reginald Scot, Wm. Fulk, and others."\* Dr. Bucknill, in his "Psychology of Shakespeare," has pointed out with what bright and telling wit Shakespeare has caricatured the notion that "madness is occasioned by demoniacal possession, and is curable by priestly exorcism"—a trace of which, he says, remains to the present day in Canon LXXII. of the Church, which provides that no minister without the license of the Bishop of the Diocese, shall "attempt, upon any pretence whatsoever, either of possession, or obsession, by fasting and prayer, to cast out any devil or devils, under pain of the imputation of imposture, or censure, and deposition from the ministry."†

Thus far at least in the history of English literature, its greatest names have all been those of believers in the Christian Religion. If skepticism is to beget a poetry which will take rank with that of the great Christian singers, it is to the future we must look for it. The present gives little sign so far of producing it. We must be permitted to express the doubt as to whether it can grow in such a soil. For such a poetry must root itself in the moral and spiritual. Wordsworth predicted that Science would beget a poetry worthy of the past, and worthy of science. It may come. If it does come we shall hail the advent with joy. But we venture the prediction that it will be the poetry of a believing and not an unbelieving science; a science that connects human life and human destiny with a personal God, which looks out upon his great handiwork in Nature, and finds

\* New Shakespeare Soc., Transactions, 1874, p. 439.

† See Dr. Bucknill's comments, Psy. of Shakespeare, pp. 255-7.

everywhere its deepest note in the Redemption. For only such views make man great and find enough in humanity to sing of. Much of modern doubt has had only one effect so far as humanity is a theme for the handling of literature. Evaporating from human life all those grander meanings which Shakespeare so clearly saw and sung, it will sing—if it sing at all—only in thin and feeble notes. Meantime, let us be thankful, that the greatest of English poets—the greatest, indeed, of all poets—has embodied so much of the Christian faith regarding God and man, in his immortal dramas.

JAMES O. MURRAY.





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